The BOC— The Battery's Command Post

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The battery operations center (BOC) serves "as an alternate fire direction center (FDC) and as the battery command post (CP)," according to *FM 6-50 Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for The Field Artillery Cannon Battery*. Unquestionably, the BOC backs up the FDC.

FM 6-50 continues: "In a battery-based (3x6) unit....the BOC serves as a focal point for internal battery operations, to include command and control, battery defense, coordinating logistics and all other operational functions normally performed by a headquarters." Those also are unquestionably the responsibilities of a CP. But FM 6-50 does not provide guidance on how the BOC fulfills those responsibilities. In fact, no Field Artillery publication does.

Our observations at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, is that this lack of guidance results in units' using the BOC unproductively. This article examines the role and organization of the BOC and focuses on techniques and procedures for the BOC to function productively as a CP.

The Role of the CP. To determine the BOC's role as the CP, the commander must consider doctrine from outside FA manuals. *FM 7-10 The Infantry Company* is a great starting place. It states, "It [the CP] consists of the commanding officer (CO) and other personnel and equipment required to support the command and control (C^2) process for a specific mission. It is located where the CO determines it can best support his C^2 process. Its purpose is to provide communications with higher, lower, adjacent and supporting units; to assist the CO in planning, coordinating and issuing the company operations order (OPORD); and to support continuous operations by the company." Among other duties listed, CP personnel provide input or recommendations during planning, and receive and send situation reports (SITREPs) and other reports.

Another source of guidance for the commander on BOC functions is the "TOC Functions" in Section II of the "Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) Newsletter 95-7." The section describes the basic functions of the battalion tactical operations center (TOC): receive and distribute information, submit recommendations to the commander, and integrate and synchronize resources.

Although these references discuss infantry company CPs and battalion and brigade TOCs, one can draw parallels for the BOC. Clearly the role of the BOC includes serving as a battery's information management center and operations monitor/communications hub.

Equipment and Manning. The first question is what makes up the BOC. The best configuration for the BOC is in the back of a cargo high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV). The addition of a trailer is also helpful.

Usually, the BOC consists of the executive officer's (XO's) vehicle equipped with two single-channel ground and airborne radio systems (SINCGARS). We recommend mounting or remoting these radios into the cargo compartment. The BOC also needs an AN/GRA 39 with DR-8 and WD-I wire, electric lights, a TA-312 telephone, an OE-254 antenna, information boards, maps, office supplies and applicable training and field manuals (TMs and FMs) and standing operating procedures (SOPs).

Personnel for the BOC is the next issue the commander must solve. With no table of organization and equipment (TO&E) for BOC personnel, the battery commander configures his BOC knowing that the personnel also will have to perform their other jobs (see Figure 1).

Successful BOCs have an NCO-in-charge (NCOIC). The NCOIC is responsible for the accuracy and timeliness of reports, obtaining required and (or) requested information, battery situational awareness and keeping the battery leadership informed.

Assisting the NCOIC is at least one radio/telephone operator (RTO). The

NCOIC	RTO/Assistant
Supply Sergeant	Wireman
Communications Section Chief	Armorer
NBC Sergeant	Medic
Maintenance Sergeant	Uncommitted Driver

Legend:
NBC = Nuclear, Biological and Chemical
NCOIC = NCO-in-Charge
RTO = Radio/Telephone Operator

Figure 1: Suggested Battery Personnel for the BOC

RTO must do more than merely monitor the radio. He gathers and documents information, posts graphics, submits reports and passes messages to the appropriate agencies in and outside the battery.

The BOC uses shifts to implement continuous operations. The NCOIC conducts thorough shift-change briefings that cover the current status of reports, enemy and friendly situations, the commander's critical information requirements (CCIR) and future operations.

To man the BOC, the commander must take into consideration that the soldiers must accomplish their primary responsibilities while serving in the BOC. For example, pairing the supply sergeant with a wireman in the BOC is better than pairing the supply sergeant with the armorer; this keeps two men from the same section from working in the BOC at the same time. The battery commander must clearly articulate to these individuals what he expects of them in the BOC–what the BOC must do for him and the battery.

BOC Operations. The BOC must be the one-stop location for all information important to continuous operations and tactical decision making. All operational information flowing to and from the battalion must pass through the BOC. The BOC analyzes information passed down from the battalion and sends it to the battery in a usable format.

For example, intelligence and operational summaries describing grid coordinates and phase lines are difficult for sections without maps to understand. The BOC should translate such information into "down-to-earth" terms. Reporting "the enemy was sited at grid VQ 456432 and moving south" means little to the sections. The BOC rewords the information to tell the battery that "the enemy was sighted about 30 minutes ago three kilometers north of and moving toward the battery."

It is not enough to simply post the locations of the firing units on a map. The graphics must be current, locations updated and the general scheme of maneuver understood. The BOC must post all minefield locations and mark secure routes. It must legibly present all information critical to the commander in an accurately, timely manner.

A proven technique to post information is on status charts and information boards. The charts and boards must be large enough to read from a distance, usually from the tailgate to the cab, and must be easy to update. One method is to mount these boards on Velcro for easy removal and to make duplicates of the boards for easy updating.

Not all information coming into the BOC needs to be posted on graphics or status boards. The commander tells the BOC what information he wants posted, which is usually the information most helpful to him. The posted information ranges from the brigade commander's intent for fire support to charts depicting the number of operational, manned and available howitzers (see Figure 2).

- Brigade Commander's Intent for Fire Support
- Unit Locations
- Enemy Time Line
- Call Signs/Frequencies
- Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Warning Status
- Fire Support Plan
- Clear Routes
- Change-Over Briefings
- Communications Status
- Downwind Status
- FA Battalion Commander's Intent
- Friendly Mortar Locations
- 9-Line Medical Evacuation Request
- Perimeter Defense Sketch
- Listening Post (LP)/Observation Post (OP) Guard Locations
- Target List
- Aid Station Locations
- Air Items Status
- Maintenance Status
- Mission-Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) Level
- FA Battalion Mission
- Known Minefields
- Fire Order Standards
- Current Graphics
- Personnel Graphics
- Logistics Status
- Guard Rosters
- Fuel Status
- Current Operations
- Services Schedules
- Battery Mission
- Enemy Situation
- Ammunition Status
- Howitzer Availability
- Personnel Alpha Roster
- Nitrogen Availability
- Leaders Roster
- Water Status
- Future Operations
- Current Jumpmasters

Figure 2: Suggested BOC Information Requirements

Any information important to the battery, but not posted on charts, still requires recording. Maintaining information on DA Form 1594 Daily Staff Journal (Duty Officer's Log) is a proven technique. As a general rule, you cannot record too much information or be too specific in the duty log. (The BOC supplements the duty officer's log with a forms and publications library.) It's especially important for the BOC to record in the log the sending of reports, the reception of orders and the contents of change-over briefings.

The BOC is the battery commander's staff. The information posted and recorded in the BOC is what enables him to conduct predictive analysis and be proactive (as opposed to reactive). The following scenario shows how BOC operations allow the commander to be proactive.

As the battery commander enters the BOC, the NCOIC hands him a report that B Company, 2d Battalion, 345th Infantry just discovered what the brigade S2 believes is the enemy's company supply point (CSP). Indications are that the brigade commander will make 2-345 IN's attack on the CSP his main effort.

With the help of the posted and updated information in the BOC, the battery commander analyzes the current azimuth of fire, the ammunition on hand and the number of crews available. He then determines if the battery needs to lay on a new azimuth of fire, request ammunition or change its howitzer readiness status. He decides if the battery can support the brigade's effort and makes recommendations to the S3, as necessary.

This simplistic example illustrates key points. The BOC must be keenly aware of the brigade and battery situations. The BOC must keep the graphics current so the commander has the correct picture of the battlefield. With the most up-to-date info, the battery commander knows which decisions he can implement on his own and which he must check with higher headquarters.

As simple as these procedures appear, BOC operations require training and the battalion and battery commanders to articulate their expectations for the BOC. Knowing what information is important to continuous operations is

difficult for personnel if they haven't deployed as part of a BOC for extended periods. Some suggestions are to list the CCIR for the personnel and identify information or events that require the commander's immediate attention, even if he's sleeping.

Communications. Information enters the BOC from various sources. Much of the information comes through on the Field Artillery battalion command net. But considerable information also comes from the gun line, FDC or various other agencies linked to the BOC.

Most units maintain two FM communications nets in the BOC: the command net and the administrative/logistics (A&L) net. It is our observation that dedicating a radio to the A&L net has little benefit. However, monitoring the brigade's operations and intelligence (O&I) net or the brigade command net instead yields a greater profit.

Techniques for the BOC to stay abreast of the logistical situation are for the administrative and logistics operations center (ALOC) to call the BOC on the command net and direct it to the A&L net, when necessary, or set times for BOC radio checks on the A&L net as part of the battalion battle rhythm. This allows the BOC to monitor reports and orders that impact the brigade's current and future operations while still staying on top of logistics.

One common lament of soldiers gathering all this information in the BOC is that different battery leaders issue contradictory instructions. Often, these instructions result in wasted man hours and counterproductivity. If the BOC issues instructions to sections, then section personnel can inform their leaders when the leaders' orders interfere with previously issued instructions.

This aspect of information flow proves to be difficult for units to accomplish because it's far easier to make on-the-spot corrections instead of going back to the BOC and having it issue the corrections battery-wide. Obviously, some events require immediate correction, such as safety violations. However, taking the extra time to issue instructions from the BOC, regardless of how mundane these instructions may appear, prevents soldiers from trying to execute conflicting instructions.

Alternate FDC. The BOC's role as an alternate FDC is an important one that has an impact on its role as a CP. In order for the BOC to perform as the alternate FDC, it must have the tools to receive fire missions, compute data and issue fire commands.

At the JRTC, we've observed two techniques units use to give the BOC an FDC capability. One is for an extra fire direction computer to be present in the BOC. Occasionally, this is a battery computer system (BCS) or lightweight computer unit (LCU). Normally, however, the backup computer system (BUCS) is the second means of computation. If a BUCS or other computer is not available, then the BOC computes the data manually.

Updating this "FDC" system with meteorological (Met) information, position changes and the five requirements for accurate and predicted fires is a challenge. Some units assign a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 13E Fire Direction Specialist to the BOC. He is responsible for updating the firing information in the computer or on the manual sticks. Normally, he computes the fire missions.

If a battery has enough personnel in the FDC to conduct continuous operations, then using a 13E in the BOC won't hinder primary FDC operations. For example, the battery commander can require off-shift FDC personnel to sleep near the BOC. If a situation arises where the FDC becomes incapable of computing data, the off-shift personnel can be awakened to answer calls-for-fire in the BOC.

Commanders should develop an occupation drill for the BOC. The occupation drill should be based on the battalion's expectations.

Training. Training BOC personnel is difficult. We often observe BOCs not trained in their duties and responsibilities. Often, they haven't worked together before rotations at the JRTC. Again, the result is an unproductive BOC.

Once the battery commander determines who will man his BOC and what he expects of it, he must dedicate time to train it. One technique is to set the BOC up in the motor pool and conduct a command post exercise (CPX). The BOC sets up in its normal configuration with its assigned personnel. The commander issues an OPORD. A remote radio operator sends scripted orders, SITREPs, intelligence summaries (INTSUMs) and operational instructions. The BOC updates graphics, records information and passes instructions to other elements of the battery. The "other elements" could simply be one or two leaders who replicate the gun line, FDC or supply section. These leaders also send information to the BOC.

The scenario can be as simple or complex as the battery commander feels beneficial. During live-fire operations, the BOC routinely conducts fire missions in addition to tracking the current (scripted or real-time) brigade situation.

Most 3x8 battalions deploying to the JRTC send only one platoon. This presents a dilemma for the platoon-based battery commander: how does he have an alternate FDC and what elements serves as his CP with only one platoon present? A solid technique is to deploy a BOC to the JRTC to provide more realistic training.

The suggestions in this article for a battery-based BOC also work for a platoon-based battery. The BOC as the CP is especially useful in the platoon-based battery often employed in stability operations. Such operations bear a remarkable resemblance to the low-intensity conflict phase of JRTC rotations.

The BOC is an element of the battery that's critical for keeping the commander informed and proactive, helping to ensure faster, more effective fires where they can do the friendly force the most good.

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